- but not doing much about it,

TOP OF IT ALL WE ARE LEARNING THAT THE HEALTH OF THE MINISTER IS ALWAYS REFLECTED IN THE HEART OF THE CHURCH. & vice versa.

Jim's invitation

Any topic - whatever tugs at your heart

We could talk about a lot - urban ministry - pluralism - cultural diversity

what tugs - ministry - wealth - effectiveness of all of us can we do this people.

SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR MINISTERS IS A TOPIC OF INTEREST TO ANYONE WHO CARES ABOUT THE CHURCH. | BUT FIRST A STORY. ONE OUGHT TO GO HOME WITH AT LEAST ONE USABLE STORY FROM A MEETING LIKE THIS. AND THE BEST ONE I HEARD RECENTLY WAS TOLD BY NONE OTHER THAN HELEN WALTON, MRS. SAM WALTON WHO FOUNDED THE WAL-MART DEPARTMENT STORE CHAIN - AND WHO IS A STRONG PRESBYTERIAN AND SUPPORTER OF PRESBYTERIAN MISSION. | IN FACT SHE WAS SPEAKING TO A GROUP OF CLERGY AND LAY PEOPLE ABOUT MISSION WHEN SHE TOLD A STORY ABOUT A MINISTER WHO WAS MAKING HOME CALLS AND WHO STOOD AT THE DOOR OF ONE OF HIS PARISHIONERS. | HE COULD HEAR THE TELEVISION INSIDE SO HE KNEW SOMEONE WAS AT HOME, BUT NO ONE CAME TO THE DOOR

Replace - Yorkminster, Toronto -

IN RESPONSE TO HIS KNOCKING. HE PERSISTED - NO RESPONSE. SO HE TOOK HIS LITTLE CARD FROM HIS POCKET AND WROTE - "BEHOLD, I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK. IF ANYONE WILL OPEN THE DOOR I WILL COME IN AND EAT WITH HIM." HE PUT THE CARD IN THE MAILBOX, WENT ON ABOUT HIS CALLING AND PRETTY MUCH FORGOT ABOUT THE INCIDENT. THE NEXT SUNDAY, AFTER THE SERVICE AS HE WAS GREETING HIS CONGREGATION, A W[redacted]N/COUPLE - HANDED HIM A SMALL CARD. IT SAID SIMPLY, GENESIS 3:10. HE PUT THE CARD IN HIS POCKET AND LATER, IN HIS STUDY, GOT HIS BIBLE OFF THE SHELF, LOOKED UP GENESIS 3:10 AND READ: "I HEARD THE SOUND OF YOU...AND I WAS AFRAID BECAUSE I WAS NAKED AND I HID MYSELF."

Rev. 3:20

SURVIVING IN THE PARISH - A TIMELY TOPIC I TRUST IN THE MIDST OF WHAT FOR US HAS ALWAYS BEEN A CRITICAL TIME OF THE YEAR, PROBABLY THE BUSIEST ~~- AND ONE OF THE REASONS WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT SURVIVAL SKILLS IS THAT~~ IN ABOUT ~~45~~ DAYS THE WHOLE CIVILIZATION IS GOING TO HAVE A WONDERFUL HOLIDAY SEASON. AND JUST AT THE MOMENT THE REST OF THE WORLD TAKES A DEEP BREATH, PULLS BACK FROM THE BUSINESS OF LIFE, IN ORDER TO ENJOY FAMILY, ~~festival~~ meals AND TRAVEL ~~AND RECEIVE GUESTS WITH FRIENDS~~ - JUST AT THAT MOMENT THE CLERGYPERSON IS WORKING OVERTIME. I LOVE CHRISTMAS - BUT IT EXACTS A HEAVY TOLL ON CLERGYPERSONS. THIS YEAR THE CALENDAR IS MOST UNKIND. CHRISTMAS DAY COMES ON A SATURDAY. WHAT THAT MEANS IS THAT WHILE THE WORLD IS PARTYING ON FRIDAY - WE'LL BE PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES AT 5:30 AND 11:00 P.M. AND THEN ON ~~SATURDAY~~ SUNDAY ALL

But what we know is that ~~the~~ it won't stop.. as it does for the rest of the world

3 weeks - 2 actually - no one means much the week before - or after!

Sunday

Prepare

Saturday

a few hours late

- CHRISTMAS DAY - ~~WE'LL~~ HAVE WORSHIP AT 11:00 A.M. AND A COMMUNITY MEAL AT NOON... AND ~~THEN~~ SATURDAY NIGHT, CHRISTMAS NIGHT - WHEN THE WORLD COLLAPSES - IN W. H. AUDEN'S WONDERFUL DESCRIPTION:

"HAVING DRUNK (AND EATEN) SUCH A LOT,

STAYED UP SO LATE, ATTEMPTED - QUITE UNSUCCESSFULLY - TO LOVE ALL OUR RELATIVES, AND IN GENERAL GROSSLY OVER-ESTIMATED OUR POWERS."

JUST AS THE WHOLE WORLD "CRASHES" - ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT, THE WORKING CLERGY-PERSON IS ~~IN HIS OR HER STUDY WORKING ON~~ A ~~SERMON FOR THE NEXT MORNING - SUNDAY!~~

AND THEN, AS OFTEN AS NOT ON A DAY LIKE TODAY, WHEN THE WORLD IS PLAYING GOLF, WALKING IN THE WOODS, DOING ERRANDS, CLERGY ATTEND MEETINGS TO HEAR ANOTHER OF THEIR PROFESSION TALK ABOUT IT - ON THE OUTSIDE CHANCE THAT WE MIGHT

LEARN SOMETHING NEW ABOUT HOW TO DO IT BETTER.

I'M NOT CRITICIZING - WE DO IT FOR LOVE. WE DO IT BECAUSE WE LOVE OUR LORD AND WE LOVE THE CHURCH AND WE LOVE OUR PEOPLE AND WE DO PROFOUNDLY PROCLAIM AND BELIEVE THAT YOU FIND YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU LOSE IT.

BUT, I AM DEDICATED TO THE PROPOSITION THAT MANY OF US LOSE OUR LIVES UNNECESSARILY, AND THERE ARE WAYS TO ENHANCE LIFE AND REVERENCE GOD'S GIFT OF OUR OWN LIVES AND ACTUALLY TO LOVE AND ~~KNOW~~ honor THOSE PERSONS GOD HAS GIVEN US TO LOVE AND HONOR... AND JUST, PERHAPS, IN THE PROCESS, TO BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE IN OUR PROFESSION AND TO HELP OUR CONGREGATIONS TO LIVE FAITHFULLY.

I LOVE BEING A MINISTER. ~~EVEN AT CHRISTMAS, PARTICULARLY AT CHRISTMAS.~~ I ~~CAN'T IMAGINE CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS OR~~

~~EASIER IN ANY OTHER WAY AND MY YOUNG-~~

~~SIERS, ALL GROWN NOW, I AM INCLINED~~ TO

~~THINK, AGREE.~~

BUT I WOULD HAVE US ATTEND TO A DEEPER PHENOMENON in the culture TO WHICH OUR OWN FRENZIED PACE OF LIFE POINTS AND THAT IS A NEW AND SERIOUS EPIDEMIC OF STRESS, AND STRESS RELATED ILLNESSES. IT AFFECTS OUR PEOPLE: THEY BRING IT TO CHURCH.. SOME OF THEM COME TO CHURCH BECAUSE OF IT.. IT IS CONTAGIOUS. AND IT AFFECTS US. URBAN PHYSICIANS EVEN HAS A NAME FOR IT. IT'S CALLED YUPPIE DISEASE ((YUPPIE IS OUR AFFECTIONATE ACRONYM FOR YOUNG URBAN PROFESSIONAL). IT'S SYMPTOMS ARE ANGER, DEPRESSION, CHRONIC FATIGUE.

IT AFFECTS CLERGY. THE PEOPLE IN CHARGE OF THE HEALTH, WELFARE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRESBYTERIAN MINISTERS IN THE U.S.A. REPORT ~~THE~~ THAT 25%

OF US ARE TRYING TO MOVE TO NEW POSITIONS. I THINK THAT'S CONSERVATIVE AND I DON'T THINK FOR A MOMENT THAT IT IS PRESBYTERIAN PHENOMENON. I BELIEVE HALF OF US ARE HOPING TO MOVE FROM WHERE WE ARE AND ARE INCREASINGLY UNHAPPY. OUR INSURANCE PROGRAMS REPORT THAT SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF US - AND OUR SPOUSES - NEED THERAPEUTIC CARE, FROM MARRIAGE COUNSELING, TO PSYCHOTHERAPY, TO SUBSTANCE ADDICTION PROGRAMS. WE'RE HURTING, I THINK, AS A PROFESSION. AND I BELIEVE OUR PAIN IS AT LEAST IN PART A REFLECTION OF A CULTURE THAT IS HURTING AT A DEEP LEVEL.

Condense stress — through A 66

the pump and yelled, "Can you fill it up? Can you fill it up now?" The attendant was busy and indicated that he would be there in a minute. The young man pounded the steering wheel, yelled that a minute wasn't fast enough and tore back onto the street. Minutes later he was back at the pump, having realized that he wasn't going far on an empty tank. [Newsweek, April 25, 1988, "Stress on the Job."]

That incident was an illustration in a Newsweek cover article about stress. It was one of hundreds of similar articles in professional journals and popular magazines recently on the topic of stress and burnout.

Anyone who deals with people: health professionals, bus drivers, waitresses and bank tellers, knows that there is something peculiar going on, something new and unpleasant. We are becoming a stressed-out society.

We are acknowledging that stress is real: that much of it is peculiar to this particular

used to ride
My son rides bus to work...
One morning a woman got on w/o correct change.
an argument ensued.
sh would it bridge
passengers started to get out of
pulled over, stopped -
got off - "I'm late
it - I don't need
this - I quit"

What is stress

time. People have always experienced stress, but at nowhere near the level that has become the norm for us. We know that stress is sometimes creative but mostly it is unhealthy and debilitating. It makes us feel miserable. If it is unresolved it results in a condition called BURNOUT - which is the collapse of the human spirit, the emptiness which occurs when one has spent-out all one's physical, emotional and spiritual resources. We are learning a lesson that is as old as the human race, namely that the ways to cope with stress and the threat of burnout are often spiritual.

What is stress? A psychologist friend of mine says its "any outside pressure that makes you feel bad inside."

We can theologize about it . . .

to P 15

Stress is part of being human. In all of creation, God gave us, alone, the ability to worry, the capacity to imagine the worst and we are experts at it. In ~~his most~~ book, Frederick Buechner says telling us not to be anxious is like telling a person with a head cold not to sneeze...

situation calls for a long, sustained response - like driving a car or like putting up with a demanding boss. The trouble is the Fight/Flight response gets triggered in the office... and you can't reach through the phone and strangle the person who set it off." - or in Bd. mtg. - or at dinner table

an argument at dinner until in fact interfer w/ your digestive functn

It not only feels miserable to be stressed, it is very unhealthy. The simple fact is that when you are stressed your digestive system isn't working very efficiently. Those jolts of adrenaline stretch the walls of your arteries and they thicken over time. The cost of stress-related illness is estimated to be 150 billion dollars per year.

What is new and particularly dangerous is that stress now results from our way of life and overwork. "Today's business world has generated corrosive ways to wear down our bodies and spirits," Newsweek observes. Fully three-quarters of Americans say their job causes stress.

A New York Times article reported a major new

study of occupation related stress. It described the classic case of a broker on ~~October 19,~~ whose blood pressure and pulse perfectly reflected the drop in stock prices. The more the market fell, the more his pulse and pressure increased. The interesting new discoveries, however, are that top executives are not as vulnerable to stress as others - particularly those in high demand/low control jobs, that is people who have to produce but have little say in how to produce. ~~A recent study revealed that~~ race car drivers are not nearly as stressed hurtling around the track at 200 m.p.h. as they are in the pit, when the mechanics are in control. The highest risk category of all, it turns out, is mothers and homemakers whose daytime job is high demand/low control, and who then come home to meal preparation, piano lessons and an argument with a husband.

The good news, relatively speaking, is that you are not imagining it. It's not just because you're older, slower and not able to keep up.

~~In fact, there is more stress about the~~ bad ~~news.~~ The bad news is that it feels terrible, can ruin your relationships, deplete your spirit, render you ineffective, make you sick, and ultimately kill you.

Part of our ~~unhappiness~~ - the threat to our survival comes from our participation in our culture. And part of it is related to our particular work - to what we do and who we are.

Our work is often lonely. ~~Structurally, the system doesn't surround us with supporters, friends~~ and colleagues. Often there is ~~no care-giver~~ for us; ~~and we insist that those who could, be called~~ "Executives."

The local parish in which most of us work is a lonely outpost. It's difficult for some of us to have close friends in the congregation. Sometimes we are the youngest person around - by 20 years. A young woman colleague sat and wept in my office and told me that in one year she had not had a single social contact in her central Illinois, rural,

parish and she was dying of loneliness.

We live in a different time zone, live by a different calendar. We are always out of step. Sunday is Friday for us. Our weekend begins Sunday night. Monday is Saturday. Who wants Monday off? I want Saturday along with everybody else. So do my children. There are no weekends to go away for. Holidays are when you work double time. When your neighbors are packing up the wagon for spring break, you're in the middle of Holy Week.

We live by different rules, expectations and possibilities, and while that's part of the reason we went into this business, there is a time between the age of 35 and 40 when your peers are beginning to hit it big, and buy new houses and cars and you know with a terrible clarity, that your 3.5% cost of living increases aren't ever going to make much of a difference and that what you know all around you is essentially it.

Ambition, drive, upward mobility are encouraged, nurtured, celebrated and rewarded in

the culture, but not in the church. We are not to let ambition, dreams, pride - interfere, so we bury them - ~~or let them get and live with the guilt~~

We have high demand, ~~low paying~~ jobs. We must function with considerable skill and expertise as counselors, scholars, executives, teachers, accountants, cheerleaders, and - of course - preachers. We can't really get by very well unless we do all of it with skills, and yet we're not sure anyone even takes us seriously. We are caricatured by our culture, people don't think we have a real job, our kids tell us their friends ask - "What does your Dad/Mother do?"

We can find ourselves in every page of Anne Wilson Schaef's Co-Dependence, as those whose "lives are structured by the question 'What will others think?'.. those who are totally dependent on others for their very right to exist." [p. 48, 49]

And, since there is no clear job description,

no sales quota to meet, no production schedule to accomplish, we never know when we are done working, and we are susceptible to the work addiction Schaef describes (~~although I'm suspicious of a cultural disease which includes everybody in the world and which Wayne Oates descriptively called Workaholism~~.

One of the best essays - and one of the most helpful - was written years ago by Professor Joseph Sittler under the title - "The Maceration of the Minister" (~~It is published several places -~~ The Ecology of Faith and portions in Grace Notes and Other Fragments, the little book of essays published on Sittler's 75th birthday. I commend it to you. Even if you don't like what Sittler says, he uses the language beautifully and innovatively. Reading a good Sittler sentence is a little like watching ~~Michael~~ Jordan blast off at the free throw line ~~even better~~ a soaring glorious slam.

"To macerate" is to "chop up into small pieces." The size or location of the congregation doesn't matter; although I have a sense that

maceration is more of a likelihood for men and women in solo situations, going it alone and doing it all.

Sittler wrote that "in seminary classrooms, the student comes to know that the 'basileia tou theou' is a phrase of enormous scope and depth, and its study ought to persist throughout life. And then the professor visits the graduate on the job and sees the lines of old books on the shelves. Filed on top of these will be mementos of present concerns: a role of blueprints; a file of negotiations between the parish, the bank and the Board of Missions; samples of asphalt tile; and a plumber's estimate." [Grace Notes and Other Fragments, p. 58]

And finally the heart ache - the sense that thins are not not right, are maybe even out-of-control in our lives: the sense that everyone else seems to be living orderly, intentional existences with jobs that pay them what they are worth and reward them for excellence while yours feels like

And so for sooooo us -

it is careening from one crisis to another - like the circus performer spinning fragile plates on top of sticks, madly rushing from plate to plate, keeping them all up in the air.. the disappointment that these little colonies of heaven we ~~sense~~ sense in fact are not always heavenly, that the people in them are altogether human which means at least partially hellish, translate that sometimes thoughtless, unkind, hurtful.. the unflattering comparison with your successor - "Why when Rev. Smith was here we used to have big crowds on Sunday morning".. the mindless criticism, ~~the sense that because you're the preacher they can say anything~~.

The way many of us try to survive in the parish, it seems to me, is by outworking everybody else, in the language of Co-Dependency, by becoming people pleasers with such a totality of commitment and that we we can even justify it as the Cost of Discipleship. Do you recall Richard Pryor's attempt to make comedy out of the terrible incident in which his drug apparatus blew up and his clothes were on fire and even though he knew better he raced out of the house and ran down the street - because he said he knew as long as he was running he was alive and that if he stopped running he'd be dead. I didn't laugh at that. It sounded too familiar.

Richard Pryor is an American comedian whose career - & comedy very nearly ended when he had a terrible accident. Pryor tried to

Wayne Oates called it Workaholism - a disease which appears in our 20s and 30s and if uninterrupted can and often is fatal in our 60s. You know the symptoms A workaholic salts conversations with allusion to how early he was at work and how she stayed later than anyone -

-a workaholic always finds a way to say how

much work he is doing

-she is always busy, breathless, slightly disorganized, in a hurry, always a little late.

-he is truly over-committed, believing that if he doesn't do it nobody else will with the sad result that nothing is done very well with resulting guilt and despair.

-she has real trouble with grace, real trouble receiving gifts from others - compliments, kindness, love, acceptance, grace - from anyone and from God.

— Oates was not writing about clergy persons specifically - but in his description of Workaholism I see a familiar portrait of many of us ... perhaps, to a degree, all of us.

How to survive? I do believe it helps to know why we hurt. And while there is a risk that we will wallow in self-pity or even enjoy our martyrdom, and a very real possibility that we will feel anger and resentment - I think it makes sense to look honestly at what we do and why we don't feel good about it.

And I like - modestly - to propose some survival techniques.

The first is

-Live in the present... It was a moment of revelation for me when, reading a book by James Dittes, Minister on the Spot, I saw that that wonderful character in John 5, lying on his mat for 38 years beside the pool of Bethzatha, really didn't want to be healed, at least in the present... Maybe someday, somehow he'd make it to the pool on time. I think there is something intrinsic to our humanity which is aroused by the eschatological dimension of the Gospel which leaves us always watching and waiting for "it" to happen

in the future, whatever "it" is.

We conclude, early on, that the Kingdom isn't coming in this parish. Maybe another one... with a few more members, a bigger budget, more leadership, more commitment. We invest heavily in the hope that the future will bring us joy, satisfaction, peace, salvation even. In the meantime we have to grit our teeth and slug it out.

That, I propose, is a lousy way to be in ministry and it's a lousy way to live. It's a part of our humanity that needs saving. So let's ask God to save us from it. Let's stop taking so seriously the wonderful success stories others tell us about their parishes and look with renewed interest and love and hope to ours.

Let's listen to one of our brothers, Fred Buechner:

"You are alive. It needn't have been so. It wasn't so once and it will not be so forever. But it is so now. And what is it like: to be alive ~~in this maybe one place of all places anywhere life~~ ?

Live a day of it and see. Take any day and be alive in it. Nobody claims that it will be entirely painless, but no matter. It is your birthday and there are many presents to open. The world is to open." [Alphabet of Grace, p. 36] Live in Prest

2. The second is

-Not all demands are equal

If they are. If you cannot say no, if you respond with totality and immediacy to every stimulus, you are not in charge of your life. God is not in charge of your life. You can't really blame your people either. The fact is nobody's in charge.

The Maceration of the Minister is a fact, maybe not even a bad fact. I love the diversity - the demand to be administrator, counselor, scholar, teacher - all before noon. Marty tells about sitting on an airplane talking to a very successful business man - whose whole life is invested essentially in selling paper clips - and thanking God for the magnificent diversity of this modest

Job of ours. But - you don't have to exacerbate the Maceration. You can understand it and say no sometimes and stop believing that stuff about it not getting done if you don't do it. You can assemble a Personnel Committee - even if its only one other person and clarify what the people for whom ~~who~~ you work want you to do with your time. You will, I am sure, be surprised by the possibilities of grace which almost always occur simply by asking them to help you with this.

3 — The third idea is -

-Administration is Ministry

— Tedious routine is not the shadow side of our calling - it is better described as the enabling power of mission. Administration is helping churches do what God calls them to do. If you mean what you say when you affirm belief in the Holy Catholic Church, there is nothing more urgent than learning how to administer and doing it with intelligence, imagination, love and in prime time.

4 — The fourth idea is that there is -

Cit Lilly End.
project. B.I.T.E..
Theol ed. hasn't changed for 500 yrs..
but the job has.
leading a congregation
'Management' - which theol. faculties treat as if it were a profane word.. is what we do..
So doesn't it make sense to acknowledge it & learn what we can about it.?

Rent to Be Paid

Jim Glasse said it in Putting it Together in the Parish:

"Most parishes want three things from their pastor. If he meets these minimal requirements - he is free to do what he wants. Once the rent is paid she is free to march for peace, paint pictures, play golf -

"But first - the rent

1. Preaching and worship - a Sunday morning to which they are not ashamed to bring their friends.

2. Teaching and Pastoral Care - they want to know that the pastor cares about them and will help them with their faith journey.

3. Administration - a balanced budget, a working furnace and a visible and effective organization."

Glasse says paying the rent is not full time work, but if we do it - we will be free.

Idea five is -

5 -

High priority to preach -
schedule - it - your preparation for preach is your work.
they are paying us to go to scripture for them. w/ their question + to speak a word
- I discipline myself + study + write + will not be interrupted.

-There is enough Time -

Remember that great Michael Quoist prayer about time - "they never have enough time...they have no more time...! Lord we have enough time." It's true.

When I was newly ordained, serving a small church in Northern Indiana - steel workers and small farmers and a teacher or two - I knew that it was important to prove my worth to them by working harder and longer than anyone else. It was Saturday ~~Sunday~~ morning, early - I was behind my desk. Into the study came the husband of the treasurer to bring me my check and a dozen eggs. Mike Paddock, grizzled, tough foreman in the mill: "What the hell you doin' here on Saturday morning?" Mike asked. "You ought to be home with your family, like everybody else." "But Mr. Paddock," I protested, "I need to be available to people. I need to be here when they are and that means Saturday." "Baloney" he said. "People don't wanna see you today. They wanna go to the store, get a

haircut, watch the game. Go home. They'll see you tomorrow."

If we work all week and then tell ourselves that we must be there for our people when they are free - we will work evenings and Saturdays and Sundays and we do, many of us. So some time ago I started refusing to do that, and I'm sorry someone didn't tell me even earlier. I missed bathing the babies for a while - but not for long. I simply refused to miss one-time games or concerts... I ~~am~~ was ~~fairly shameless about it. I am still saying~~ "I ~~can only stay 30 minutes. My son's game begins at~~ 8:00."

I was shameless about it & still am

Mike Paddock never heard of Henri Nouwen - but they think a lot alike. Nouwen talks about the Ministry of Unavailability - of being intentionally unavailable and what that does not only for us - but for our people. I've never refused a telephone call because I was praying - but I'd like to, and I certainly have refused meetings and appointments because I have symphony tickets. And I have had

folks say thank you for showing that it's OK to miss a church meeting in order to be with family. Nouwen was appalled at all the open doors in our offices - our relentless accessibility and the toll it had to take on us personally.

6. - Idea six is -

-Be a Steward of Yourself... spend your lives with intention. Give it away - with imagination.

a). Take care of yourself physically. We are, in fact, whole beings. Your heart and spirit are connected to your arms and back and stomach. so eat right and sleep enough and get regular exercise

b) and nurture your spirit. Read - read as much as you want to read - it is part of your job - and it is how you feed your soul.

Cite successful broker, Paul Gignilliat - quoting Shakespeare -

Cite states attorney, Jim Zartman plays violin two hours a day - 6:00-8:00!

[illegible]:

1 - Live in the Present
2 - Not all Demands are Equal
3 - Administration is Ministry
4 - There is Rent to be Paid
5 - There is Enough Time
6 - Be a Steward of Yourself

Buechner wrote

"At its heart most theology, like most fiction, is essentially autobiography. Acquinas, Calvin, Barth, Tillich, working out their system in their own ways and in their own language, and all telling us the stories of our lives, and if you press them far enough, even at their most cerebral and forbidding, you find an experience of flesh and blood, a human face smiling or frowning or weeping or covering its eyes before something that happened once... I cannot talk about God or sin or grace, for example, without at the same time talking about those parts of my own experience when these ideas become compelling and real." [Ibid, p.3, 4]

So, in the final analysis, it comes back to the faith of the minister. After we have laughed, wept and mused over our "sitz im leben" - we are left with our faith and the call of Jesus Christ to be faithful witnesses...

And I confess to you that the topic always makes me a little defensive... Albert Curry Winn, former President of Louisville Presbyterian

to 35

The Alban Institute did a survey on tithing to find out why lay-people are dissatisfied with their pastors.. This topic makes me uncomfortable and a little defensive..

scripture | we pray | particularly if praying means struggling with, wrestling, agonizing over, cursing sometimes, expressing our hearts | week in and week out. | We spend a lot of time on spiritual discipline and we are on a journey. | Our faith is growing and developing and becoming every time we lay it all out before a congregation.

Listen to your own life FB advice

So listen to your life and your spirit. | And pay special attention to moments of passion and profound caring - when your eyes, in spite of yourself, are full of tears.

And listen to the Gospel. | Listen to what you preach.

Faith begins - like music - not in your mouth - but in your ear, someone said. | The Gospel is heard and experienced before it is spoken.

So listen - the words you speak to others are for you.

The words of encouragement, consolation, courage and hope which you struggle to articulate with all your integrity and strength - those words

(+) When my mother died, + friends rallied around + wrote notes of sympathy.. + the ones that touched me most deeply said. "John - listen now to the Gospel you proclaim to others.. | Stand now in the assurance + love + promise of God which you have conveyed to so many people."

are first of all for you.

...the bread you break for others is first of all - bread for your hunger and the cup you are privileged to raise in the company of the faithful is first of all for your thirst.

...the Gospel is not limited to your understanding of it... the Christian faith, the thank of God, is not limited by my experience of it - or by ability to articulate it. In fact, there are times when I must articulate what I do not yet fully comprehend - or fully believe. there are times when I must rely on that larger faith of the Church to get me by - all the saints have known that.

my faith is not adequate

But that Gospel is for me - and you. The grace we announce is for us. The acceptance we proclaim is ours.

The Good News of the Gospel is that in Jesus Christ God loves us.

That grace requires no work, no merit, no overtime, no martyrdom to merit it... It requires

nothing - only our openness and receptivity. That grace we believe is sufficient. At [illegible] we believed that the grace of God in Jesus Christ was all that was necessary to save life -

That grace is for you...

Thanks Be To God!

It can help us survive in the parish.

It can save our lives -
even in the work of ministry.

It can set us free...

The grace of God - in J.C. is for you!

Thanks be to God

So as a body in ministry - may I have the privilege of sharing this blessing with you? Here it: